



# STATUES AND STATUTES: Evaluating Iconoclastic Policy Approaches to Addressing Confederate Statues

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## Background

The University of Texas at Austin removed six statues of figures with ties to the Confederacy. The statues were all part of a monument that intended to represent a Southern perspective of history.

- The Jefferson Davis and Woodrow Wilson statues were removed in August 2015
- The Robert E. Lee, Albert Sidney Johnston, John Reagan and James Stephen Hogg statues were removed in August 2017
- Wilson and Hogg were not Confederate veterans, but they were supporters of the 'Lost Cause'

The Task Force on Historical Representation of Statuary was formed in June of 2015 in the wake of the shooting at Emanuel African Methodist Episcopal Church in Charleston, South Carolina. The remaining four statues were removed in August of 2017, only eight days after the White-Nationalist rally in Charlottesville, Virginia. These four statues were removed in the veil of night. Little notice was given to the campus community that the statues were to be removed.

## Motive

The motive of the paper is to evaluate the decision to remove the statues of Confederate figures from campus grounds and propose an improved policy approach that can be extracted and used to address controversial statues in public spaces elsewhere.

## Methods

The paper addresses the implications of the University's chosen policy and explores the alternative policies that were considered, but ultimately forgone in favor of removal. The paper frames the considered and taken policies as ones of iconoclasm. Iconoclasm is the attacking or destroying of images; an act of iconoclasm is further argued to be any act that alters an image or its intended meaning and reception. 'Museumification', both in re-contextualization and conservation, would be iconoclastic following this interpretation; scholars have dubbed this negative cultural redefinition.

## Findings

Policies of Removal (Chosen Policy) and Replacement

- Risk erasure of history and sidestep productive conversation about the state of race relations
- Prioritize symmetry and aesthetics over re-education

Policy of Compensation

- May lead to the equalizing of the validity and righteousness of the added statuary of important minority figures with the that of the Confederate figures

Policy of Re-contextualization

- Plaques promote re-education passively
- Cannot defeat the powerful message sent by bronze statues on pedestals

The University prioritized minimizing prolonged discussion about its ties to a controversial past. Immediacy of relief and symmetry influenced the particularities of removal.

## Conclusion

The paper recommends a policy of active iconoclasm as a means to re-appropriating the Confederate statues to fit our contemporary values.

Forms of active iconoclasm explored include:

Chaining

- UT Professors Al Martinich (dept. of philosophy) and Tom Palaima (dept. of classics) proposed chaining the ankles of the Confederate statues

Hooding

- Hooding is the practice of placing a hood over the entire head of a prisoner and is standard procedure for executions
- Hooding shields the spectators from the pain, fear, possible defiance, and humanity revealed on the prisoner's face

Plaques should accompany the active forms of iconoclasm to explain what the statues were created to represent and why they should be actively opposed.

The recommended policy is applicable beyond this case study and can be used to address controversial statues and monuments in public spaces.

## Acknowledgements and References

I would like to thank Dr. Glenn Peers and my friends, both in and outside of class, who engaged in insightful conversation with me and provided encouragement. Graphic image by Alexa Hawksworth.

